

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

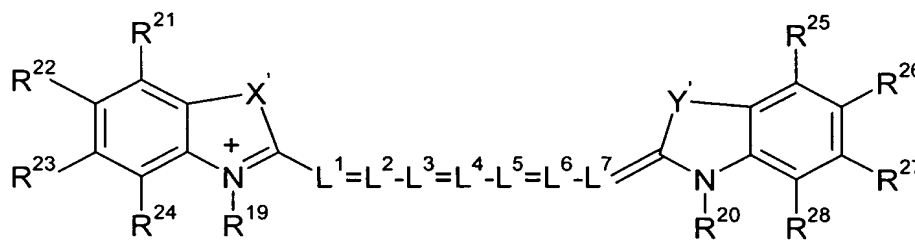
Claims 1-28 (Canceled)

31. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 36, wherein the sodium salt of a compound of formula III-1 is introduced into the living body in combination with near-infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a sodium salt of claim 29 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

32. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 46, wherein the sodium salt of a compound of formula III-1 is introduced into the living body in combination with near-infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a sodium salt of claim 35 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

33-35. (Canceled)

36. (Currently Amended) A method of fluorescence imaging comprising introducing a compound of claim 29 sodium salt of a compound of formula III-1 having three or more sulfonic acid groups in a molecule



[III-1]

wherein

L¹-L³ and L⁵-L⁷ are each an unsubstituted methine,

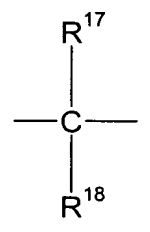
L⁴ is methine substituted by alkyl having 1 to 4 carbon atoms or an alkyl having 1 to 4 carbon atoms and substituted by a sulfonic acid group,

R¹⁹ and R²⁰ are lower alkyl having 1 to 5 carbon atoms and are substituted by a sulfonic acid group,

R²¹, R²³, R²⁴, R²⁵, R²⁷ and R²⁸ are each hydrogen,

R²² and R²⁶ are the same or different and each is a hydrogen atom or a sulfonic acid group, and

X' and Y' are the same or different and each is a group of the formula



wherein R¹⁷ and R¹⁸ are unsubstituted lower alkyl having 1 to 5 carbon atoms,

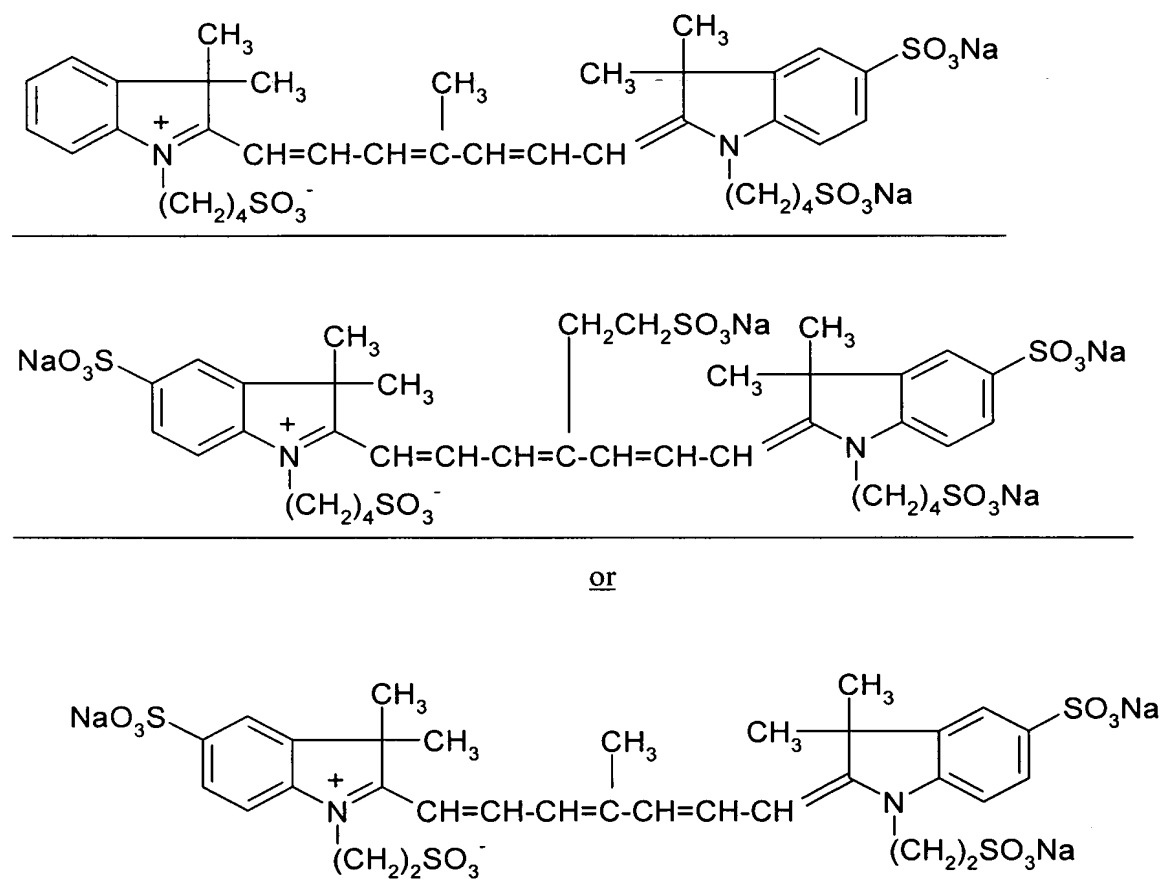
into a living body, exposing the body to excitation radiation, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from said compound.

37. (Previously Presented) A method of claim 36 for angiography.
38. (Previously Presented) A method of claim 36 for tumor imaging.
39. (Currently Amended) A ~~compound~~ method of claim 36, 29 wherein in the sodium salt of a compound of formula III-1 lower alkyl in R¹⁹ and R²⁰ is of 1-4 C-atoms.
40. (Currently Amended) A ~~compound~~ method of claim 36, 29 wherein in the sodium salt of a compound of formula III-1 lower alkyl in R¹⁹ and R²⁰ is of 1-2 C-atoms.
41. (Currently Amended) A ~~compound~~ method of claim 36, 29 wherein the sodium salt of a compound of formula III-1 has 29 ~~having~~ three sulfonic acid groups.
42. (Currently Amended) A ~~compound~~ method of claim 36, 29 wherein the sodium salt

of a compound of formula III-1 has ~~29~~ having four sulfonic acid groups.

43-45. (Cancelled)

46. (Currently Amended) A method of fluorescence imaging comprising introducing a compound of ~~claim 35~~ the formula

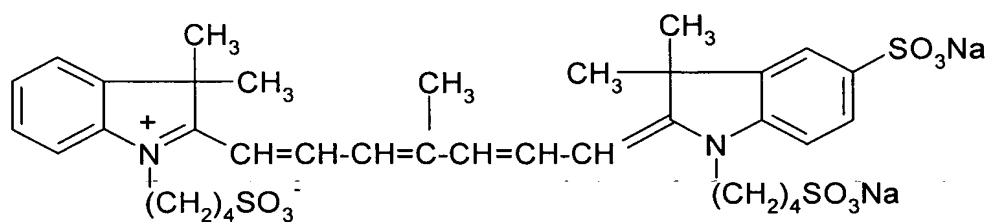


into a living body, exposing the body to excitation radiation, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from said compound.

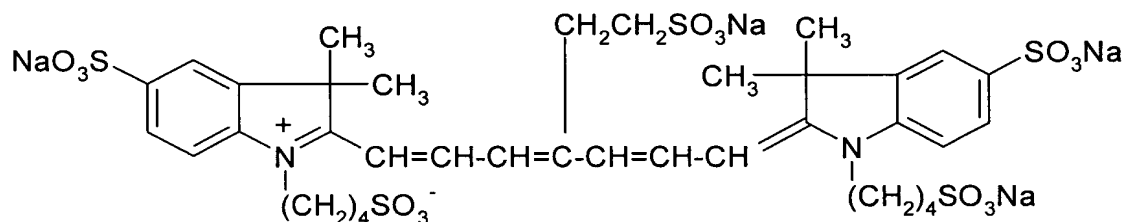
47. (Previously Presented) A method of claim 46 for angiography.

48. (Previously Presented) A method of claim 46 for tumor imaging.

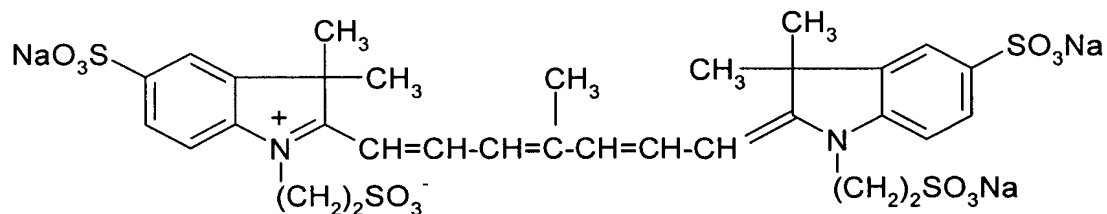
49. (New) A method of claim 46, wherein the following compound is introduced into a living body



50. (New) A method of claim 46, wherein the following compound is introduced into a living body



51. (New) A method of claim 46, wherein the following compound is introduced into a living body



52. (New) A method of claim 51 for angiography.

53. (New) A method of claim 51 for tumor imaging.